

HOW HERMY PUT IT OVER

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Drawings by F. Vaux Wilson



WHAT do you know about luck, eh? Say, there was a time when I banked heavy on such things as four-leaf clovers, and the humpback touch, and dodgin' ladders, and keepin' my fingers crossed after gettin' an X-ray stare. The longer I watch the game, though, the less I think of the luck proposition as a chart for explainin' why some gets in on the ground floor, while others are dropped through the coal chute.

Now look at the latest returns on the career of my old grammar school chum, Snick Butters. Maybe you don't remember my mentionin' him before. Yes? No? It don't matter. He's the sporty young gent that's mortgaged his memorial window to me so many times,—you know, the phony lamp he can do such stunts with. He's a smooth boy, Snick is,—too smooth, I used to tell him,—and always full of schemes for avoidin' real work. For a year or so past he's held the hot air chair on the front end of one of these sightseein' chariots, cheerin' the out of town buyers and wheat belt tourists with the flippest line of skyscraper statistics handed out through any megaphone in town. They tell me that when Snick would fix his fake eye on the sidewalk, and roll the good one up at the Metropolitan tower, he'd have his passengers so dizzy they'd grab one another to keep from fallin' off the wagon.

Yes, I always did find Snick's comp'ny entertainin', and if it hadn't been more or less expensive,—a visit always meanin' a touch with him,—I expect I'd been better posted on what he was up to. As it is, I ain't enjoyed the luxury of seein' Snick for a good many months; when here the other afternoon, just as I was thinking of startin' for home, the studio door opens, and in blows a couple of gents, one being a stranger, and the other this Mr. Butters.

Now, usually Snick's a fancy dresser, no matter who he owes for it. He'll quit eatin' any time, or do the camel act, or even give up his cigarettes; but if the gents' furnishing shops are showin' something new in the line of violet socks or alligator skin vests, Snick's got to sport the first ones sprung on Broadway.

SO, seein' him show up with fringes on his cuffs, a pair of run-over tan shoes, and wearin' his uniform cap off duty, I can't help feelin' some shocked, or wonderin' how much more'n a five-spot I'll be out by the time he leaves. It was some relief, though, to see that the glass eye was still in place, and know I wouldn't be called on to redeem the ticket on that, anyway.

"Hello, Snick!" says I. "Glad you came in,—I was just going. Hope you don't mind my lockin' the safe? No offense, you know."

"Can it, Shorty," says he. "There's no brace coming this time."

"Eh?" says I. "Once more with that last, and say it slower, so I can let it sink in."

"Don't kid," says he. "This is straight business."

"Oh!" says I. "Well, that does sound serious. In that case, who's your—er— Did he come in with you?"

I thought he did at first; but he seems so little interested in either Snick or me that I wa'n't sure but he just wandered in because he saw the door open. He's a high, well built, fairly good lookin' chap, dressed neat and quiet in black; and if it wa'n't for the sort of aimless, wanderin' look in his eyes, you might have suspected he was somebody in particular.

"Oh, him!" says Snick, shootin' a careless glance over his shoulder. "Yes, of course he's with me. It's him I want to talk to you about."

"Well," says I, "don't he—er— Is it a dummy, or a live one? Got a name, ain't it?"

"Why, sure!" says Snick. "That's Herm'y. Hey you, Herm'y, shake hands with Professor McCabe!"

"Howdy," says I, makin' ready to pass the grip. But Herm'y ain't in a sociable mood, it seems.

OH, bother!" says he, lookin' around kind of disgusted and not noticin' the welcomin' hand at all. "I don't want to stay here. I ought to be home, dressing for dinner."

And say, that gives you about as much idea of the

way he said it, as you'd get of an oil paintin' from seein' a blueprint. I can't put in the pettish shoulder wiggle that goes with it, or make my voice behave like his did. It was the most ladylike voice I ever heard come from a heavyweight; one of these reg'lar "Oh-fudge-Lizzie-I-dropped-my-gum" voices. And him with a chest on him like a swell front mahog'ny bureau!

"Splash!" says I. "You mean, mean thing! So there!"

"Don't mind what he says at all, Shorty," says Snick. "You wait! I'll fix him!" and with that he walks up to Herm'y, shakes his finger under his nose, and proceeds to lay him out. "Now what did I tell you; eh, Herm'y?" says Snick. "One lump of sugar in your tea—no pie—and locked in your room at eight-thirty. Oh, I mean it! You're here to behave yourself. Understand? Take your fingers off that necktie! Don't slouch against the wall there, either! You might get your coat dusty. Dress for dinner! Didn't I wait fifteen minutes while you fussed with your hair? And do you think you're going to go through all that again? You're dressed for dinner, I tell you! But you don't get a bite unless you do as you're told! Hear?"

"Ye-e-es, sir," snuffles Herm'y.

Honest, it was a little the oddest exhibition I ever saw. Why, he would make two of Snick, this Herm'y would, and he has a pair of shoulders like a truck horse. Don't ever talk to me about chins again, either! Herm'y has chin enough for a trust buster; but that's all the good it seems to do him.

"You ain't cast the hypnotic spell over him, have you, Snick?" says I.

"Hypnotic nothing!" says Snick. "That ain't a man; it's only a music box!"

"A which?" says I.

"Barytone," says Snick. "Say, did you ever hear Bonci or Caruso or any of that mob warble? No? Well, then I'll have to tell you. Look at Herm'y there. Take a good long gaze at him. And—sh-h-h! After he's had one show at the Metropolitan he'll have that whole bunch carryin' spears."

for tryin' out barytones. Besides, I got to catch a train."

"All right," says Snick. "Then we'll trot along with you while I tell you about Herm'y. Honest, Shorty, you've got to hear it!"

"If it's as desperate as all that," says I, "spiel away."

AND of all the plunges I ever knew Snick Butters to make,—and he sure is the dead gamest sport I ever ran across,—this one that he owns up to takin' on Herm'y had all his past performances put in the piker class.

Accordin' to the way he deals it out, Snick had first discovered Herm'y about a year ago, found him doin' the tray balancin' act in a porcelain lined three-off-and-draw-one parlor down on Seventh-ave. He was doin' it bad, too,—gettin' the orders mixed, and spillin' soup on the customers, and passin' out wrong checks, and havin' the boss worked up to the assassination point.

But Herm'y didn't even know enough to be discouraged. He kept right on singsongin' out his orders down the shaft, as cheerful as you please: "Sausage and mashed, two on the wheats, one piece of punk, and two mince, and let 'em come in a hurry! Silver!" You know how they do it in them C. B. & Q. places? Yes, corned beef and cabbage joints. With sixty or seventy people in a forty by twenty-five room, and the dish washers slammin' crockery regardless, you got to holler out if you want the chef to hear. Herm'y wa'n't much on the shout, so he sang his orders. And it was this that gave Snick his pipedream.

"Now you know I've done more or less tra-la-la-work myself," says he, "and the season I spent on the road as one of the merry villagers with an Erminie outfit put me wise to a few things. Course, this open air lecturing has spoiled my pipes for fair; but I've got my ear left, haven't I? And say, Shorty, the minute I heard that voice of Herm'y's I knew he was the goods."

So what does he do but go back later, after the noon rush was over, and get Herm'y to tell him the story of his life. It wa'n't what you'd call thrillin'. All there was to it was that Herm'y was a double orphan who'd been brought up in Bridgeport, Conn., by an uncle who was a dancin' professor. The only thing that saved Herm'y from a bench in the brass



"You Don't Get a Bite Unless You Do as You're Told!" Says Snick.

"Is this something you dreamed, Snick," says I, "or is it a sample of your megaphone talk?"

"You don't believe it, of course," says he. "That's what I brought him up here for. Herm'y, turn on the Toreador business!"

"Eh?" says I; then I sees Herm'y gettin' into position to cut loose. "Back up there! Shut it off! What do I know about judgin' singers on the hoof? Why, he might be all you say, or as bad as I'd be willin' to bet; but I wouldn't know it. And what odds does it make to me, one way or another?"

"I know, Shorty," says Snick, earnest and pleadin'; "but you're my last hope. I've simply got to convince you."

"Sorry, Snick," says I; "but this ain't my day

works was his knack for poundin' out twosteps and waltzes on the piano; but at that it seems he was such a soft head he couldn't keep from watchin' the girls on the floor and striking wrong notes. Then there was trouble with uncle. Snick didn't get the full details of the row, or what brought it to a head; but anyway Herm'y was fired from the academy and fin'ly drifted to New York, where he'd been close up against the bread line ever since.

"And when I found how he just naturally ate up music," says Snick, "and how he'd had some training in a boy choir, and what a range he had, I says to him, 'Herm'y,' says I, 'you come with me! First I blows in ten good hard dollars getting a lawyer to draw up a contract. I thought it all out by myself;